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## Stoler, A.L. *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in our Times*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016.

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**Stoler, A.L. *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in our Times*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016.**

*Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* by Ann Laura Stoler thoroughly disrupts how scholars and activists decipher colonial histories to once again reclaim critical thought as a strenuous endeavor. At its core, the volume explores a deceptively straightforward question: How can we study imperial formations without succumbing to “a teleology of the present” or restricting ourselves “to the policed categories of colonial archives themselves” (p. 72)? In the process of critically engaging with this question, Stoler offers readers an innovative and thoughtful methodological intervention that is relevant for a multitude of disciplines and fields of study including politics, philosophy, history, anthropology, and sociology. In each chapter, Stoler poses questions from different disciplinary traditions and organizes an equally diverse body of evidence that includes literature, social theory, newspaper articles, novels, posters, films, and treatises.

In chapter one, Stoler introduces readers to what is at stake in her study, arguing that the colonial presence occurs at the intersections of duress and occlusion, on the cusp of endurance and change. Her rethinking of durations and temporalities destabilizes the tendency to search for imperial formations in the linear and predetermined fashion that has become a mainstream methodology for many non-traditional thinkers that are suspicious of normative analyses. Stoler argues that by critically re-engaging with concepts that we may take for granted, different layers of colonial history might become accessible. Recognizing the ambiguities of history in general, and colonial lineages in particular, Stoler relies on Foucault’s notions of “mobile thought” and “ethics of discomfort” as methods that capture the forms that duress takes at “lower frequencies” and the endurance it requires as occlusion secures the invisibility of bodies and knowledges (p. 7). In chapter two, Stoler explores why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has only recently entered the field of (post)colonial studies. She argues that the ways in which scholars decided to engage with the work of Edward Said and other critical thinkers during the formation of (post)colonial studies as a field was far from innocent and that coupled with pressures from outside the academy, the collective decisions made regarding the interpretation of Said and others disabled potentially useful conceptual frameworks (p. 66). The chapter highlights how group pressure, fear of isolation, and the silences they generate in the US academy enter our scholarship and our worlds in destructive ways that keep hidden counterintuitive knowledges. In chapter three, Stoler draws on primary archival research that explores children’s agricultural colonies in mid-nineteenth century France to argue that the boundaries between colonies and camps bleed into one another when we think about these social formations and political concepts in the larger context of imperial governance across territorial borders.

Chapter four interrogates occlusion in relation to race politics in contemporary France. The chapter argues that public debates on race have more recently entered French society because of the concerted effort of scholars and artists. She contests the idea that these racial histories are forgotten or overlooked in the French experience. Instead, she argues that the connection between race and colonialism was historically avoided, severed and pushed aside every time scholars resorted to silence in the face of uneasiness. Stoler concludes that breaking through the aphasia that colonial histories produce does not mean that one must draw a direct link between the past and present. Instead, conceptualizing colonial racism “demands specific and located histories of the present that retain the complexities and ambiguities of colonial entanglements—and equal attentiveness to when they no longer matter at all” (p. 169). Chapter

five claims that imperial and colonial histories redistribute sovereignty in ways that are unequal and offer a large segment of the world's population "gradations of rights" (p. 177). Moreover, the chapter argues that the question of "degrees of sovereignty" is not neatly bounded by the territory of a nation-state and that we should become accustomed to breaking away from the narratives that states tell about themselves and their limits. Chapter six invites readers to re-engage with colonial historic text through an appreciation for the epistemic ambiguity, uncertainty, and poorly thought out colonial ambitions that an affective lens brings to the forefront. In chapter seven, Stoler argues against tendencies to think about racism as fixed categories or as temporally defined and instead suggests that "racism takes on the form of other things, wraps itself around heated issues, descends on political pulse points, appears as reasoned judgments, beyond sentiment, as it takes over impassioned bodies" (p. 264). In chapter eight, Stoler pushes readers to reconsider the methodological significance of the term "relevance" as she argues that the French Radical Right movement is hardly new and is part of a "deep, racialized feature of colonial and contemporary France" (p. 16). Chapter nine reminds us that intimacy is not only related to the familial domain, childcare, and love but that it is also a condition for humiliation, loss, and violation. The chapter relies on discussions of contemporary wars, torture, and sexual politics in the US, Middle East and North Africa, and Europe. Finally, chapter ten addresses the debris and ruin that co-exist with the struggles of peoples living in (post)colonial contexts.

Stoler has for a long time now moved between different concepts, disciplines, and sub-disciplines with an agility that is inspiring for all who aim to create knowledge in an interdisciplinary fashion. The book posed the following question for me: As a postcolonial citizen, is it possible to break out of the duress of colonial histories? What do people make with the debris they are left with from their respective colonial histories? The book seems to argue that breaking from one's colonial history is possible, but the chapters generally address the durability of colonial histories and their (re)formation in new contexts. It is here that I wish Stoler had reflected on her teaching experience in Palestine and the Eastern Correctional Facility in Napanoch, New York.

In my years of teaching and living in a postcolonial country, Iran, I was struck by how some of my students embodied a remarkable ability to make note of the colonial when they saw it, but carry on cautiously with their dreams as though they did not have a history of disappointment or injury. They had an awareness about the resurfacing of the colonial in a renewed way. This awareness meant that they tried to create the conditions for new possibilities with the debris that they encountered, even when they encountered it as jaded, middle-aged academics raised in exile. In other words, not only do we need to revise our methods for seeing, but as scholars, we should also be prepared to leave room for surprises—such as an unexpected realignment of words, uncomfortable ideas explicitly stated, or a disruptive coming together of bodies that falls out of our sensual knowing. This attempt to create anew as a strategy for decoloniality, which has a long history among the underserved communities of the world, may be a useful starting point for future studies interested in (post)colonial studies. *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* is a pressing and timely book that will be of interest to all concerned with questions on liberation and entrapment.

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